

## **WRIGHT BROTHERS MASTER PILOT AWARD**

**Fairbanks Flight Standards District  
Office Honoree 2004**



**WEIN, RICHARD.** Richard Allan Wien was born at St. Joseph's Hospital in Fairbanks, Alaska on July 20, 1935 to Noel and Ada Wien. He was the youngest of three children and by the time he was 12 years old, he was hanging out at Weeks Field cleaning airplanes and, he admits, getting into everyone's hair! Richard soloed on his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and received his private pilot license at the age of 17, followed by his commercial pilot license and instrument rating.

In July of 1955, he started flying for Wien Alaska Airlines out of Bettles. His first job involved flying mail and passengers in the company's Norseman aircraft. Eventually he became Chief Bush Pilot and Director of Stations and Bush Operations for Wien. One of his most memorable summers began in the spring of 1958, when one of the company's C-46's broke through the ice, during a landing on Peter's Lake, which is located on the north side of the Brook's Range. Richard says he flew over 50 flights that summer, shuttling supplies between Barter Island and Peter's Lake, first in a Cub and later in a

Norseman on floats. Eventually the recovery team was able to winch the aircraft up out of the water and make the repairs. In November of that same year, the crew was able to successfully fly the C-46 out.

Richard continued to fly for Wien Airlines and in 1960 he made what he says is the best decision of his life, and married Sally O'Neill, who was born and raised in Alaska. In 1969, Richard reached a turning point in his career. After many years of flying for Wien Alaska Airlines, Richard made the difficult decision to leave the family business and branch out in a new direction. Richard, along with his brother Merrill and fellow aviation enthusiasts Stan Halverson and Doug Millard started a small company called Merric, Inc., operating B-25 bombers and fighting forest fires for the Bureau of Land Management. The Hiller Helicopter Manufacturer was anxious to get one of their helicopters operating in Alaska and they offered a fly now, pay later deal on a Hiller Model 12E. The group decided there was a future in helicopters, so they took the deal. Eventually the company expanded and merged with ERA Helicopters becoming, at one point, the third largest helicopter company in the world. In 1981, Richard was offered the job of Chief Operating Officer of ERA, but declined, as it would have required a move to Anchorage.

Because of his roots in Fairbanks, Richard decided to leave ERA and in 1986, he acquired controlling interest in Florcraft, Inc. where he became both chairman and CEO. Since that time, Richard has become involved in many community activities. He currently

serves on the Alaska Airlines Board of Directors and is the Chairman of the Governor's Alaska Aviation Advisory Board. He also serves on the board of directors or advisory counsels for Usibelli Coal Co., Holland American Line, Wells Fargo, and the University of Alaska Museum of the North.

Over the years, Richard has flown a variety of aircraft, ranging from single engine Cessnas, to Norsemen, Beavers, Beech 18s, C-46's, F-27's and helicopters. His favorite, though, is the Pilatus Porter, which was the first aircraft of its kind in the United States. Wien Airlines purchased the airplane from a company in Switzerland and had it shipped to the United States in a crate. After it was reassembled, it was used for many years by the airline.

In his spare time, Richard enjoys flying to his cabins in northern Alaska and spending time with his wife Sally as well as their children Kelly, Michael, and Leslie.